

VZCZCXRO3870
RR RUEHGA RUEHHA RUEHQU
DE RUEHVC #0078 0951749
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 041749Z APR 08
FM AMCONSUL VANCOUVER
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4889
INFO RUCNCAN/ALL CANADIAN POSTS COLLECTIVE
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
RUEFHLC/DEPT OF HOMELAND SECURITY WASHINGTON DC
RUEHVC/AMCONSUL VANCOUVER 7240

UNCLAS VANCOUVER 000078

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DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAN, DS/P/MECU, CA, CA/OCS, CA/EX, CA/VO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CA](#) [KOLY](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [CMGT](#)

SUBJECT: MANAGING 2010 OLYMPICS BORDER TRAFFIC

REF: VANCOUVER 0076

¶1. This is the second of two cables looking at preparations for the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics. Issues related to economics, commerce and logistics are covered in ref. This cable addresses the travel of tourists and participants to the Games and potential issues for border management.

¶2. The increased global tourism associated with the 2010 Olympics could have a significant effect on USG visa and border management operations. Vancouver International Airport officials told us they are fully confident of their ability to handle the increased traffic. The airport has a surge capacity built in for the summer cruise season and expects this to be more than adequate to handle the February Olympics' load. But the Vancouver Olympics Committee (VANOC) is keenly aware that many visitors to the 2010 Games will either visit or transit through the United States. One major concern is the Olympics' credentials given to athletes, dignitaries, National Olympics Committees (NOCs), and other Olympics family members, which are a valid visa for Canada at the time of the Games, but not for the United States. They are worried participants will attempt to transit or enter the U.S. using their Olympics' credentials only. VANOC told us they have already reached out to officials at Seattle-Tacoma Airport to develop protocols for dealing with VIPs and other participants who arrive without the proper documentation. As an aside, they expressed the desire to discuss whether the U.S. government would consider allowing the Olympics credentials also to act as at least a transit visa for the U.S. during the Games.

¶3. Another concern is the volume of visitors from non-visa waiver countries who will want to visit the U.S. once they arrive in Canada. This poses a particularly large problem for the Consular section in Vancouver. To address both issues, CONGEN Vancouver proposed incorporating U.S. visa and travel information in the packets that VANOC will send out to all participants and NOCs prior to the Games. We are also working to include the same information in packets sent to ticket holders. VANOC responded enthusiastically to our proposal and, although they are not ready yet to compile these packets, would very much like to have our input when the time comes.

¶4. Border traffic management during the Games has dominated the discussions at most cross-border meetings and conferences in the region. CBP and CBSA are working together to develop surge plans to cope with the unusually high volumes expected for the Games. Again, the timing, in February, means that by all estimates maximum volumes will not be more than the normal highs experienced in summer. However, construction at the Peace Arch port of entry in Blaine, Washington, which is now scheduled for completion in March 2010, has organizers and officials on both sides of the border concerned. GSA has promised to minimize impact at the time of the Games and has indicated that most of

the construction will be completed prior. But the Olympics are highly visible and there is a strong desire by local communities to look their best in promoting the region. The timing of the construction at Peace Arch will continue to be a major source of angst and if the timetable slips again local officials are likely to demand that GSA do whatever it takes to get the project completed before the Olympics.

15. VANOC and BC officials display a strong sense of the cross-border benefits of the Olympic Games. VANOC officials informed us they are already discussing sending portions of the torch relay through the U.S. Most notably, they would like to have the torch in New York City at the time the UN issues its Truce Proclamation, a regular event prior to any Olympics. Also the organizers are considering bringing the torch through the Peace Arch border crossing and actually holding a small ceremony. Plans for the torch relay are not scheduled to be released until fall 2008 but if Peace Arch figures prominently this will only increase the pressure on the construction timetable.

16. Comment: Officials on both sides of the border are aware of the potential pitfalls related to border management for such a high profile event. Canadian and American local authorities are cooperating to address the issues and come up with workable solutions for the 2010 Games. For some issues the solutions may require more engagement from Ottawa and Washington, D.C., to ensure that participants and spectators alike reach the Games with a minimum of hassle. End Comment.

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